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FROM USMISSION TO UNESCO PARIS

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SUBJECT: UNESCO STAFF SEE WORLD DIGITAL LIBRARY AS EXPANSION OF
AMERICAN CULTURAL HEGEMONY

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: John Van Oudenaren, Senior Advisor for the
Library of Congress (LOC) World Digital Library Initiative (WDL),
held an informational meeting with working level UNESCO staff and
two separate meetings on June 20 and 21 with staff from the UNESCO
Director-General's (DG) office. Elizabeth Longworth, the Chef de
Cabinet to the Director General, addressed UNESCO's general
expectations of the LOC, the European view of the WDL and plans for
a December Experts Meeting. Van Oudenaren also met with the Director
General's Advisor for the United States, Hillary Wiesner and Advisor
for Communication and Information Issues, Krista Pikkat, who had
general questions. All of the interlocutors from the DG's office,
while generally supportive of the project, held misperceptions about
its nature. While DG staff emphasized how the WDL fit in with
UNESCO's role on the post World Summit on the Information Society
(WSIS) scene, they seemed more cautious on a UNESCO role in the WDL
itself than in previous meetings. END SUMMARY.

SECRETARIAT STILL UNCLEAR ON WDL:

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¶2. (SBU) Van Oudenaren repeatedly stated to UNESCO staff that the
WDL is different from the European Digital Library (EDL). (NOTE:
The EDL is a mass digitization project, which was designed as a
publicly funded project in response to Google Print whereas the WDL
is a project to put rare and remote items on the web. END NOTE.) In
earlier meetings with Axel Plathe, Deputy for the Information
Society Division of the Communication and Information Sector and
Abdelaziz Abid, Deputy Director of the Divsions' Universal Access
and Preservation Section, both stated that they thought the WDL was
a mass digitalization project. They also mistakenly thought it
would be a portal. Longworth, the DG's new top advisor and previous
Director of the Information Society Division of the UNESCO
Communication and Information Sector, shared this view.

¶3. (SBU) Van Oudenaren stated that Librarian of Congress James Billington wants the WDL to be more than a portal; he wants it to be its own product, which would focus on unique and rare items and draw from the LOC experience with the bi-lateral Global Gateway projects and the LOC's own American Memory website. Longworth said the DG had asked if a feasibility study could be done before UNESCO got more involved with the WDL. She stated that if the U.S. did its homework on the project and could describe what it was and what it was not, then the DG could be supportive.

¶4. (SBU) Longworth and Plathe identified Aziz as UNESCO's WDL focal point. (NOTE: Aziz stated in later meetings that he plans to retire next summer and hopefully become the national librarian of his native Tunisia. END NOTE.) Aziz asked van Oudenaren to participate in a joint session with UNESCO on the World Digital Library in order to build momentum at the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) meeting in Seoul in August 2006, and suggested a large public launch in June 2007.

LONGWORTH STRESSES EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE:

¶5. (SBU) Longworth noted that the Europeans might be more inclined to join the WDL if there were a UNESCO label on it. She repeatedly mentioned European reservations with the WDL project, stated that the involvement of Google was a problem for many, and added that Jean-Nokl Jeanneney, President of the Bibliothhque Nationale de France, leader of the European Digital Library project, and author of the book "Google and the Myth of Universal Knowledge" had a "specific constituency" that he needed to address. Longworth urged the LOC to explain the WDL and its connection to Google in order to build their support for the initiative. (COMMENT: Jeanneney's new book argues that Google's digitization of books from partner libraries and its heavy reliance on works in English are deliberate acts of selection which will extend the dominance of American culture abroad. Jeanneney wrote that an archive that ignores great European literature in this way - and whose development is commercially driven - cannot provide the foundation for a universal library. END COMMENT.) Van Oudenaren stated that he had met with Jeanneney while in Paris and would invite him to the UNESCO Experts Meeting in December, though he stated that he expected that Jeanneney would hesitate to attend. (COMMENT: Mission wonders whether Longworth's cautious mood is driven by certain member state pressure. END COMMENT.)

DECEMBER MEETING AGENDA:

¶6. (SBU) The discussion then turned to the WDL Stakeholder's Meeting (known in UNESCO speak as an "expert's meeting") that will be held at UNESCO headquarters from November 31 to December 1, 2006. Longworth suggested casting the meeting as grist for a feasibility study, and using the meeting to find out what stakeholders want. Van Oudenaren noted that the draft agenda included discussions on Architecture (including multilingualism), Selection, Governance, and Financing. He stated that he hoped to establish working groups on these and other issues. Longworth said UNESCO could help with multilingualism and using search engines across languages. She noted that the multilingual aspect of the site would tie into the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) Action Line C8 (Cultural and Linguistic Diversity on the Internet), one of the 6 WSIS action lines where UNESCO is identified as a potential facilitator.

MEETING OTHER STAFF FROM THE DG'S OFFICE:

¶7. (SBU) In a separate meeting, Van Oudenaren also saw DG staff members Hillary Wiesner and Krista Pikkat. Van Oudenaren began by outlining steps that could be taken to link UNESCO to the project. These included the LOC participating in a panel discussion at the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) meeting in Seoul in August 2006 and the experts meeting in December 2006 at UNESCO Hq. Van Oudenaren stated that the December meeting could include Global Gateway librarians that the LOC has

worked with, along with librarians from the developing world. He
added that participants would exchange ideas and then develop
working groups. Van Oudenaren said it would be possible later for
the LOC and UNESCO to talk about a launch once there are 3 or 4
concrete examples of what the WDL could become. He noted that
Billington wanted concrete results that could later be shown to
Google's Sergey Brin, in the hope of obtaining further funding.

¶8. (SBU) Van Oudenaren stated that multilingualism will be a
significant aspect of the WDL, and that the project should not be
seen as an English-language dominated project. Van Oudenaren said
the LOC understood the importance of multilingualism, and would work
with the National Science Foundation (NSF) and Google on this
component of the WDL.   The NSF, in particular, has a grant program
for developing internet technology and a scientific interest in
promoting how to handle languages on the web.

LOC'S PROGRESS WITH THE WDL:

¶9. (SBU) In response to Wiesner's question about how the WDL was
progressing, Van Oudenaren said that there were 4 bilateral projects
currently in play with 3 to 4 people working on them, and the LOC
needed to get them working together. The LOC's Chief Information
officer and her 3 top lieutenants were engaged in the project, he
added. He said there were three main technical aspects that the LOC
was working on: digitization standards, web presentation, and
archives. There was also a digitization team to find and install
preservation and scanning equipment in developing countries such as
Egypt and Indonesia. In developing countries, van Oudenaren noted
the importance of training local staff and addressing preservation
and scanning challenges such as heat and sand.

LEGAL AGREEMENTS:

¶10. (SBU) Van Oudenaren also added that negotiating agreements with
various countries could be very cumbersome, and said a simplified
standardized agreement would be helpful. Wiesner suggested UNESCO
could help formulate a legal template and added that UNESCO may
already have a contract that it used for the Memory of the World
program that might be used.

REACHING BEYOND NATIONAL LIBRARIES:

¶11. (SBU) Because in today's world one can search anything by
Google, Van Oudenaren stressed that for the WDL to be relevant, it
needs to put rare and remote materials on the web and create access.
 To do this, the LOC would work not only with national libraries,
but also with other institutions such as municipal libraries.
Wiesner asked if the WDL would work with private collections, and
van Oudenaren stated that they had digitized private holdings on
Timbuktu, but would prefer to access items that the public would
have an opportunity, in principle, to see.

POSSIBLE WDL SMALL GRANTS:

¶12. (SBU) There is a lot of interest in the WDL, Van Oudenaren
noted, but the LOC only has enough money to work with a few
countries right now. For this reason, the LOC would like to start a
small grant program of grants consisting of $20-30,000. Van
Oudenaren noted that this would be a way for people to feel involved
with the project while creating content and asked if UNESCO could
provide advice on how to set up a grant program for developing
countries. Wiesner and Pikkat asked if LOC would set up
country-level selection panels for the grant program. Van Oudenaren
stated that he did not want to set up a system where countries had
to choose one item for the WDL in the model of UNESCO's Memory of
the World program.

COMMENT:

¶13. (SBU) While UNESCO interlocutors were enthusiastic about the
WDL, the meetings exposed misunderstandings on their part about the
nature of the WDL and a corresponding need to share more information
on the nature and scale of the subject. To that end, Mission has
made available the full text of Van Oudenaren's working-level
presentation to UNESCO staff. Washington may want to assess how
much of an obstacle some UNESCO member states' attitude is towards
Google and U.S.-initiated global cultural ventures. It may also
want to continue building bi-lateral support with a wide variety of
UNESCO member states before entering the politically charged and
highly bureaucratic UNESCO ring.
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